

MATURITY ESSENTIAL IN THE IDEAL HEROINE, CONSENSUS OF LITERARY OPINION OF ALL TIMES

Thirty Years Chosen as Proper Age by A. Edward Newton, Agnes Repplier and Many Playwrights, Because of Character Development

AGE DOESN'T MATTER, BUT YOUNG LOVE IS SHALLOW, HERGESHEIMER ASSERTS

From Helen of Troy to the Present Day Most of the Great Feminine Figures of Drama, Song and Story Have Been Women of Fully Developed Powers

Grow old along with me, The best is yet to be.

THUS sang the poet Browning to radiant youth and sober middle age, and distinguished creators of heroines agree.

A national contest which was held recently gave rise to discussion of the ideal age for a heroine. In 27,000 novels and scenarios submitted, the average age of the heroine was twenty-eight.

What is the ideal age for a heroine? Is the sophistication of thirty more fascinating than the blush and bloom of eighteen?

Does the poise of the woman outshine the prettiness of the girl? These questions were asked of several of the foremost writers and students of books. They agree, on the whole, with Browning; but they disagree with one another in many respects.

A. Edward Newton, book lover, book collector and writer, and Miss Agnes Repplier, the essayist, say that thirty is unquestionably the best age for heroines.

Dr. William I. Hull, head of the department of history at Swarthmore College, cites the great heroines of history as mature women. George Gibbs, novelist, dissents. A woman of twenty-three can be a heroine, he insists.

And Joseph Hergesheimer, the creator of "The Three Bad Pennys" and the recent "Cythera," declares that any age can be interesting, inasmuch as it portrays the forces of life and reactions to those forces.

It does not matter whether the character is young or old, although he says the older person reacts in a more complex and interesting way.

When the question of the ideal age for a heroine was put to Mr. Newton he was sitting in his office atop a machinery factory, quite different from the bookshelved rooms in which one would imagine an intellectual companion of the great authors would be found.

"I agree with Balzac," he began; "a woman is in her prime when she is thirty."

"It is only real old men like myself who fall in love with young things like you," and Mr. Newton's eyes twinkled at his visitor.

Older Women Cannier in the Game of Love

"The older woman knows how to play up to a man. In the game of love the young girl thinks only of the fun she is having; the older woman considers the man's intentions—and keeps him guessing.

"Get me?" he asked with a chuckle.

"The older woman," Mr. Newton continued, "has as much fire as the young girl, and in addition she knows how to direct it.

"A woman isn't worth hugging until she is thirty," he declared solemnly.

With this statement he turned his attention to the pages of literature. "Shakespeare's Juliet," he resumed, "was very young, but Italian, Cuban and Spanish girls mature early."

Jane Austen's Emma is Mr. Newton's favorite heroine; Becky Sharp his second favorite.

His telephone rang; some one called to tell him about a book on Bacchus. "Bacchus," Mr. Newton called jokingly over the wire, "has gone out of style," and he hung up the receiver.

This occasioned a new trend to the discussion.

"Do you think smoking and drinking enhance the modern woman's charm?"

"Indeed not," Mr. Newton replied. "No man really likes to see a woman drink."

"Women need no superfluous to make themselves attractive," he concluded with youthful enthusiasm.

Miss Repplier was found in her apartment on Clinton street. The chairs and pictures of the reception room were covered with chesscloth, defying the dust of summer months from the depths of their veiled security.

Miss Repplier confirmed her visitor's deduction that she was going away for the summer. But she has a great deal of work to do yet, she said—getting together books and notes that she wants to take with her. For this woman—one of the foremost essayists of the day—never discontinues her study and research, even in the vacation months.

Pointing to the books which lined the far end of the room, under the shrouded painting, the visitor asked:

"In all this lore of literature, what



tion and memory of centuries, were mature," said Dr. Hull.

He paused as he turned the pages of voluminous books of history in his study.

"I should say that where women achieved greatness in history because of an inspiring vision alone they were young," he remarked. "Joan of Arc, for instance, who led the French people to victory in the 100 years' war, was only nineteen."

"Hypatia, the heroine of philosophy, who was stoned to death because she was the first woman to dare to enter the world of learning, was young."

"Elizabeth, England's greatest queen, ascended to the throne when she was twenty-seven. Her many love affairs followed. An entire book has been written about them."

"Her most celebrated affair de cour, with the Duke of Leicestershire, whom she did not marry because she felt her subjects would not tolerate the union, reached its height when she was thirty."

"Marie de Pompadour, in her prime, dominated the reign of Louis XV in France. For years she reigned supreme at Versailles, the real power behind the throne."

"Catherine II, Empress of Russia, called the 'Cleopatra of the North,' came to her throne when she was thirty-three."

"At the same age, Napoleon's first wife, Josephine, married him."

Dr. Hull closed the history books and said: "Roman history celebrates the matrons. Cornelia is the proverbial ideal of Roman womanhood. When a newly rich lady came to see her, he called her two sons and said: 'These are my two jewels.'"

"American history celebrates the women of letters: Betty Ross, Barbara Fritchey, Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, Frances Willard, Harriet Beecher Stowe."

"It is the woman of deeds, whether her deeds are the result of a mind or of a heart, who appears on the pages of history, and that is why history is peopled with older women instead of mere girls."

From Swarthmore the seeker after knowledge went to the University of Pennsylvania.

In the psychology laboratory she found Prof. E. B. Twitmyer.

"Do young men prefer older women?" he was besought.

"Men don't like women of any one age," Prof. Twitmyer answered. "Men more women with ideas. If young girls have ideas men like them."

"I'll tell you something," the psychologist went on, confidentially. "When the boys here at Pennsylvania have a special dance or prom they send home for their girls, and often these girls are very plain and unattractive in appearance, but when you talk to them you find they are sensible and attractive to boys who are thoughtful."

"Boys in their inner consciousness look upon girls in the light of their ideal of femininity, and that is why they prefer women of that age, but because they fitted into the scheme of things in the books at the time."

"Novellists have phases. They study different aspects of life at different times. The flapper has been a passing phase in American life, and the novelists of that time, who record the life and history, should record the flapper in his novels."

"Youth has asserted itself since the war, and its independence is thoroughly interesting."

Mr. Gibbs rose from his chair, turned a couple of pictures and walked back to his canvas. Leaning over the half-finished picture, he mused:

"Life is like art. People decry all the new fads in painting, but they have a tremendous effect on art. These fads, though they pass away as distinct entities, introduce color and life into art. The flapper has done just this thing in life."

Mr. Gibbs does not believe in "the business" of fascination for a woman. He thinks that charm and fascination are part of a well-rounded life, but that the ideal woman is one who attends to her home and family. His favorite heroine in literature is Lorna Doone.

Again he was seated in his chair, this time in a meditative mood.

"I don't see how any one can say that any age will make the enduring heroine," he said. "I do believe that the girl makes a better heroine than the older woman."

is the age of its most enthralling heroines?"

"Most assuredly the older women are the more enthralling figures," Miss Repplier answered.

"Of course," she continued, "there is the old novel of adventure in which the heroine is young because she doesn't count for anything. She is just somebody for the hero to fall in love with. Take, for instance, Scott's 'Quentin Durward.' There the girl has 'black hair and eyes,' and doesn't amount to much."

Development Is Vital to Novel of Character

"But in the novel of character the woman is always older, because years develop character. Her conversation, an indispensable element in writing, is more interesting and more varied."

"Her outlook on life, based on more experiences, both happy and tragic, is more compelling than the simple outlook of the girl. She has more knowledge of the world and more knowledge of men and women."

"Of course, in the novel of passion it is the older woman, because her passions are far deeper."

"Becky Sharp," Miss Repplier explained, "with added zest, 'begins her quest in Thackeray's 'Vanity Fair,' when she is young, but she gets better and better as she becomes older, and the essayist's blue eyes shone with real enjoyment at the thought of this heroine."

"You like Becky Sharp then?"

"She is the best heroine in fiction, I would say. She is a real adventurer. She is possibly the very first woman in English fiction to conquer by means of her intellect. And nobody that has come after her quite equals her."

"The heroines in the French novels and plays are invariably married," said Miss Repplier, "and of course are older women."

Miss Repplier was asked about American novels.

The novels of Howells, she said, deal with girls. Booth Tarkington, she cited, was a successful example of the author who portrays girls in his stories.

The heroine of "Alice Adams," the novel which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize this year, is just a girl.

Then Miss Repplier closed her discussion briefly, as is her characteristic way after careful consideration of a subject has enabled her to form an opinion of its possibilities.

"The most active thing the world has to offer is the girl who has inspired lively anticipation of what the 'thing' was, 'is the young married woman."

"She is the most attractive thing imaginable. She is more assured, is much more handsome, and has many more ideas. They are fresh, refreshingly new ideas, because she has lived through more experiences."

Great Women in History Had Reached Maturity

If the great heroines of fiction are older women, what of the heroines who live in history?

What, for instance, of Cleopatra, the fascinating Queen of Egypt, who made the mighty Julius Caesar her helpless slave, and later bent the will of the famous Roman, Mark Antony, to her own purposes, and at even more completely to her will than she had that of Caesar.

The fate of nations meant little to these rulers in comparison with the wish of a woman.

Of Cleopatra, Shakespeare said: Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale Her infinite variety.

The history and literature of ancient Egypt and Rome are full of her irresistible beauty and charm.

Her age was twenty-one at the time of her affair with Caesar, and twenty-three at the time of her romance with Antony.

But Dr. Hull points out that this age is equivalent to thirty years in modern times, and that Cleopatra was more than a girl in physical and intellectual development.

Women of Deeds in History Were Mature

"The women whom history heralds because of their deeds rather than their visions are older women."

"Elizabeth, England's greatest queen, ascended to the throne when she was twenty-seven. Her many love affairs followed. An entire book has been written about them."

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"Beauty is not sufficient to carry on

romance; brains are necessary, too. But girls have brains, as they showed in the way they tackled tasks during the war."

Pamant Issue Is Reaction to Life

Mr. Hergesheimer disagrees with all the protagonists of an ideal age for a heroine. He does not believe the age is eighteen, or thirty. In short, he says an individual as an individual in a book does not interest him. Only as the individual reacts to the forces of life is he or she interesting to him.

He discussed the question at his home at West Chester, where his lively dogs romped on the lawn, where charming friends were gathered in the living room, and where the quiet of a deeply cushioned den, looking over the hill which slopes to the road, gives retreat for meditation.

"I am just as much interested in any one woman in my books as in another," he said. "Any character has her place in a book. The question of a heroine is a different matter."

"Do you know what 'heroine' means?" he asked, and stopped abruptly in his pacing up and down before the fireplace.

"A heroine," he pursued, "is not the chief character in the book, but the one who conquers in the end, Anna Karenina in a book. The question of a heroine is a different matter."

"All good books are fatalistic. The woman does not conquer in the end; life conquers—life is the heroine!"

"Diana of the Crossways might be called a heroine, but it is a cool use of a heroine."

"Life no longer is a matter of getting married and having children." That did not require much discussion.

"Now the whole thing, even love, has been elevated to the plane of an art. It takes a long while to express these things. Therefore, older women with more conscious feeling are more charming."

Youth Incapable of Real Love, Says Hergesheimer

"Love in a young person is artificial. A class of girls under twenty is virtually uniform. They fall in love and not according to instinct. Individual distinctive force develops after twenty."

"A young person, even if she is owing to the faulty economic conditions of the present day she cannot marry the young fellow whom she loves. And so she is directed as a temporary thing, and becomes artificial."

"Don't you think so?" Mr. Hergesheimer added in a characteristic way, as he stopped short to punctuate the emphatic insistence which he had placed on our economic organization.

Mr. Hergesheimer avows himself firmly against the idea of a woman "playing up to a man."

"That is vulgar," he said. "Fine people don't do it. Fine people want to improve themselves for those they love, but they do not do this other thing."

Then, in conclusion, Mr. Hergesheimer said:

"Young people are interesting as a whole in that they show group reaction to forces. But older women are more interesting because they show individual reactions which have grown out of a richer experience of life."

"The difference between the girl and the older woman," said Mr. Hergesheimer, pointing a finger straight at his visitor, "is the difference between a penny whistle and a two-keyboard organ."

But, after all, the REAL heroine is...

At left—Madge Bellamy, well-known in girlish roles

Marguerite Zender, typical of youth

Betty Blythe as the Queen of Sheba

Ruth Chatterton, impersonator of youthful heroines

Ethel Barrymore, exponent of refinements of maturity

Lila Lee, overflowing with vitality of the teens

Olga Petrova, whose acting is the faith and poise of maturity

Mary Garden as Cleopatra